

TO READERS OF “TUXES”...

I wrote this story of a multinational formalwear conglomerate called Tuxaco, and the caveman who is found frozen but alive, catapulting him to modern corporate prominence, because Sidney Sheldon, Danielle Steel, and Jackie Collins had somehow not gotten around to writing it yet.

It's the tumultuous, glamorous rich-family saga as it's never been done before. As a flat-out satire of every beach book I ever bought off a paperback rack at LAX.

Remember to pack your sunblock. Bundleworth, Texas, just up ahead, next exit.

Welcome to “Tuxes.”

Scott Fivelson
Los Angeles, California
Summer 2007

TUXES

SCOTT FIVELSON

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“*Money makes money.*”
-- Modern proverb (origin unknown)

TUXES

PROLOGUE

Texas, One Million B.C.

It was good land, rich land, big and sprawling and Paleolithic, rich in swamp, rich in algae, in the heart of The Fern Belt. Wild and unspoiled, a place just crying out in pre-linguistic grunts to be tamed, it was a land waiting for a man with a club and a dream.

So far, the clan that lived, by its own choice, in a tiny corner of these unclaimed acres had not yet seemed to produce anyone so far-seeing. The clan's lone cave was a simple mom-and-pop operation. Everyone pitched in and made choppers and scrapers. Expectations were low. You died at 30.

Meanwhile, out on the subtropical plain beyond the cave door, were the ones who, at least up until this time, had clearly been the movers and shakers.

Brontosaurus. Triceratops. Tyrannosaurus rex.

The big boys.

Fifty to 75 feet in length. Thirty tons or more.

In a word, players.

They strode the land, like some big private club, for months at a time, then wandered off, the clan didn't know where. No one asked. They just ran out and took a pee.

This was enough to ask out of life for most in the clan, who consoled themselves with faith in totems -- do-nothing gods like The Long-Toothed Cat or The Great Cave Bear. But it could never be enough for one among them, a hairy,

PROLOGUE

dynamic one, who seldom spoke but whose eyes burned, beneath a sloping forehead, with the entrepreneurial spirit.

That he had more on the ball, and walked a little taller, than some who'd come before him was unquestionably true. Yet some who came later -- his critics and detractors -- would also point out that fate just handed some guys the aces, that there was such a thing as being in the right place at the right time.

It was early one bright, steamy morning, the day of the hunt. All the ablest spear throwers and rock tossers had just gone forth from the cave in pursuit of the small game that was safe, but yielded a small return. All the strong of limb, that is, except for the hairy, dynamic one, who, as chance would have it, remained with the clan that day to pick nits from the bottom of his foot.

The cave was filled with workaday sounds: *chop, chop, scrape, scrape*. Nothing out of the ordinary, just another boring Monday.

Then it happened.

The clan look-out came scampering into the cave and announced, by way of several somersaults and frantic hoots, that they had returned.

He didn't have to name names.

Work immediately shut down on the chopper-and-scraper assembly line. There was an interval of wild and not very productive gibbering. When it finally subsided, all eyes turned to the vacant-gummed 30-year-old known as The Old One.

By The Old One's calculations, the dinosaurs had returned about a moon early. This was an omen. Wrestling with its meaning, he stared into the fire and thought out loud.

PROLOGUE

"What," said The Old One, not quite in these words, but in grunts to this effect, "are the dinosaurs doing back on the land?"

"Balls!"

The cave echoed with the voice of the hairy, dynamic one, who, having been seated by the fire eating nits till a second ago, now rose to his full, impressive height of just over five-two. He hadn't known his destiny until just this moment. He still didn't know quite how to say it. But something in that part of the human brain that had just punched its timecard told him to go for it.

"What," he said, "are the dinosaurs doing back on *my* land?"

It was The Big Bang, an earthquake, a flood, a solar eclipse. In one fell swoop -- the daring invention of the pronoun "my" -- the hairy, dynamic one had become the first, in the history of the clan, to assert ownership over the land.

There was a stunned silence, after which the cave was up for grabs. Numerous injuries were sustained somersaulting. Much hooting was done by all.

When it was quiet again, The Old One approached the hairy, dynamic one. Slapping him once on the shoulder, ceremonially, The Old One invented an expression of his own.

"Nice going," said The Old One.

Even though such a thing as currency had yet to be devised, the hairy, dynamic one knew it was time to put his money where his mouth was. Turning from the clan, he threw his club up onto his shoulder, rubbed noses with his mate -- perhaps for the last time -- and headed out the door of the cave to take care of business.

PROLOGUE

“Give ‘em hell, kid,” said The Old One, inventing another expression.

The scene greeting the caveman as he stepped out onto the steamy plain was of the kind that, in the past, had been enough to discourage any serious interest in real estate in far larger and hairier mammals. Enjoying a junket on his land, drinking his swamps, eating his leaves, were field reps from at least four of the most formidable suborders around. Momentarily, the caveman exercised his fledgling capacity for wonder to wonder why he was not more afraid to go up against these heavy hitters. His instincts were urging fight, not flight, and it would be nice to know the reason. Slowing down his approach, the caveman took time to think it out, in terms he could understand.

The hairy, dynamic one didn't know much. His world contained but a few concepts. There was day and night. Cooked and raw meat. And, then, there was winners and losers.

All at once, the caveman glimpsed, through the steamy subtropics of his mind, that he was ready to risk it all, to put it all on the line today, because he was a winner.

He knew it was just a feeling. But all the same, he knew it was true. That he was a winner -- in fact, a member of a species of winners -- and that the dinosaurs, they were losers.

Sure, they were big.

You couldn't take that away from them. And he wouldn't try.

He wasn't that petty.

But, big as they were, that didn't mean diddly. They'd had their chance, and they'd blown it.

Losers.

PROLOGUE

It didn't matter how much they tried to throw their weight around, they couldn't disguise it. It was written all over them, on their tough, crude hides. You saw it, in each attack, in their slow, lumbering walks. In the way they kept getting stuck in tar pits. You'd never said it to their faces, but you'd thought it.

Losers.

Yes, they were big.

You had to grant them that. They had big on their side. They had it in spades.

But only one species could be the best.

If you can't stand the heat, get outta the jungle.

Life's tough.

Losers.

Big losers, sure. Oh, yes. Definitely. No question about that.

But losers.

And, as the caveman had seen, the bigger they are, the harder they fall.

Having bolstered his confidence with vague thoughts something along these lines, the hairy, dynamic one quickened his pace, walked straight up to the guy in charge, a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, wound up, and clubbed it murderously on the tail.

Up till this moment, the *Tyrannosaurus* had been leaning over with its back to the caveman, leisurely eating a *Brontosaurus* for lunch, or *Brunch*. Now, turning slowly, the *Tyrannosaurus* fixed him with a long, condescending stare that seemed to say, “*Have you completely lost your mind?*”

Maybe he had. Maybe he was crazy. A cockeyed dreamer.

But then, he was more than a man with a dream.

He was a man with a club.

PROLOGUE

The combat that immediately ensued between caveman and *Tyrannosaurus* bore some resemblance to battles of will between man and beast that would occur eons later on the Texas range, except that instead of bestriding the animal's back as it reared about the plain, the caveman was spending most of his time upside down and clamped between eight-inch teeth. Blackness was closing in all around. His personal stock was plummeting rapidly. Though he might survive, clan members, watching from the mouth of the cave, were already dividing up his food ration, since there was no use in tossing good berries after bad.

That was when luck intervened. Or -- as others would have it -- when the hairy, dynamic one, by frantically wiggling his half-swallowed feet, made *his own* luck. Creating an irritating tickling sensation in the throat of the King of Dinosaurs, the caveman was spat to the ground, his sole clothing, the pelt guarding his loins, snagging on a tooth and coming completely off in the process.

He clambered to his feet and stood helpless before the dread *Tyrannosaurus rex*, no weapon in hand and all the more vulnerable for being seen, in these last moments before the end, as no dinosaur had ever seen him before: stripped to the buff. So this was it. It was all over. And he wasn't even 30. Closing his eyes, clenching his teeth, he awaited the worst...only to have his eyes jarred open by a savage, earthshaking cry from the reptile that sounded like nothing less than a roar of protest against its Maker.

For what the *Tyrannosaurus rex*, even with its limited intelligence, had been able to grasp in an instant, or rather, two -- a first look and a double-take -- was that the hairy, dynamic one had been graced by nature with a *hairy, dynamic one*; one not only *proportionately* larger than the dinosaur's,

PROLOGUE

when compared with their respective bodyweights, but, quite literally, *larger* -- the *Tyrannosaurus rex's* secret shame being that its love machine was as pathetically unmatched to its stature as its undersized brain or its spindly little forelimbs.

Which was to say, it didn't have much, the caveman had more, and now everyone knew it.

The *Tyrannosaurus* did not roar again. It did not attack. The truth was, it couldn't. Demoralized to the very core of its 30 tons, the King of Dinosaurs just turned away and slunk off the land. It did not go alone. Moving in a slow procession behind it, the other dinosaurs on the land lumbered over to the caveman one by one, took one look, and, similarly emasculated, shuffled away beneath a dark cloud of anxiety, which, if allowed to go unchecked, could mean the beginning of the end of the high-rolling species.

An end that would come, not because of climactic change or volcanic eruptions.

But because they'd learned they were losers.

Losers headed for sexual dysfunction.

And at last...extinction.

As the hairy, dynamic one stood there on the Texas plain, refastening his pelt and watching the reptiles retreat in the distance, he sensed that an era was drawing to a close. He had driven the dinosaurs off the land. *His* land. Just wait till the other clans heard. As for *his* clan, they would be somersaulting for days.

But in a vague, rudimentary way, he knew it meant more than simply the fact that the clan artist would soon be asking him to pose for a portrait, chronicling his triumph, for the cave wall. It meant a future, which, by using his overtaxed brain one last time today before the probable onset of a crushing migraine, he saw this way:

PROLOGUE

Because he possessed a hairy, dynamic one, there would be children, some of whom would have little dynamic ones of their own, capable of producing his children's children, who in turn could make children...though he could be wrong about this.

Secondly, even more important, because of what he had accomplished here, there would be something for him to pass on. A land to build on. A growing legacy. Why, it could even be the beginning of...!

His mind groped, striving -- but failing -- to invent the word "empire."

Just then, the hairy, dynamic one noticed a flower on a nearby rise. It was a new type of flora, such as he'd never seen before anywhere in these parts -- a yellow rose.

Walking up onto the rise overlooking the land that would one day be Texas, the caveman laid down his club, picked the flower, studied it closely, and -- as if seeing in it all that the future held -- ate it.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Price Bundleworth awoke at the crack of dawn, possibly the only man in America whose first thought of the day was “T-G-I-M” -- “Thank God It’s Monday.”

The weekend -- the interminable, tedious, globe-trotting weekend -- was over. And now, as it did weekly in the eyes of Price Bundleworth, the world was playing out its eternal drama of death and rebirth. Soon, like the hardy perennials unfolding their petals in the springtime sun, banks would be opening, phones ringing, options trading, the long, barren winter of a weekend in Aspen melting away. Yes, some weekends it was Aspen, others St. Moritz. If it wasn’t one of a hundred other glittering retreats where Price Bundleworth played. Played to forget. And when he could not forget, there was always the Percodan. Anything to deaden the pain that started at 5 p.m. Friday. The pain of not making money.

But now the pain was subsiding. As it did, and his head cleared, Price realized with bristling irritation that he had woken up himself, and not been roused by the rooster, whose crowing, had it occurred already, would have easily carried from the stables to the mansion. A punctilious man, as demanding of himself as he was of his employees, Price had never cherished the mornings when, due to the slackness of others, he was allowed to oversleep, and over the years had had to let several roosters go. Now, careful

not to disturb his wife slumbering quietly beside him, Price Bundleworth swiveled around to sit on the edge of the king-size bed, picked up the micro-cassette recorder he kept on the nightstand, always close at hand, and dictated a short memo, the details to be worked out later.

“New rooster.”

It was a cold, pragmatic decision, undeterred by sentiment or, thank God, as far as he knew, the possibility of having to take guff from any unions, the kind of executive fiat that Price Bundleworth had been issuing with confidence for most of his 70 years.

And the kind that, owing to a brilliant maneuver performed in the boardroom the preceding Friday, he would be issuing for many more.

As Price rose for the day, padded across to the bath off the master bedroom, and closed the door on the sound of a tardy *cock-a-doodle-do!* that would change nothing, he reflected with contentment on the way he had handled it all, bringing to a vote -- just days before his 70th birthday -- not a single resolution, but a bold resolution package that he hoped the board would find attractive. True, he'd been feeling out the board for months in subtle ways about changing the bylaws, but till the vote was actually taken, you could never be sure.

Finally, at 4:45 p.m. Friday, he'd played his gambit. President, CEO, and Chairman of the Board Price Bundleworth formally proposed an amendment to the corporate charter the key line of which was the following:

Be it resolved that the mandatory retirement age of 70 be abolished, and be it also resolved that each member of the Board of Directors shall receive, for his personal use, one South Sea island.

The resolution passed with only one vote against, this coming from a member of the board, near 70 himself and likewise able to benefit from the first part of the resolution, but who, unfortunately, was prone to outbreaks of skin cancer. The dissenter notwithstanding, Price had done it, obtained approval of a new bylaw, which, in effect, rendered him invulnerable for the remainder of his lifetime. A bylaw that secured him against the dangers of corporate politics, of ever being removed -- no matter how necessary -- due to either ill health or mental incompetence, by prohibiting such action and going on to explicitly state in its conclusion that the President, CEO, and Chairman of the Board of the corporation -- and also the holder of an indivisible block of 51% of the voting shares -- shall be, as it had always been (though never before had it actually been specified in writing), “the oldest living male member of the Bundleworth family.”

Prior to the meeting, and per his instruction, Price's lawyers had privately reviewed the resolution, which he had taken pleasure in drafting himself. Challenged to find a loophole, they had pronounced it airtight, and informed Price Bundleworth that the only possible threat to his position was if his mother, now 92, had a sex-change operation.

At last, as he stood on the brink of what he had recently begun to regard as his prime, Price Bundleworth was safe against all comers. His power base was protected, and now,

with his mind uncluttered, he would be able to get back to business. The business of acquiring more power.

At the mere thought, a sturdy erection began to crowd his pajamas. Price undressed, stepped into the shower, and, as was his custom, helped himself get back to business by turning the shower dial to “C”.

Back in the master bedroom, in reality awake all this time, Mavin Bundleworth was lying quietly and staring at the question that stared back at her from the underside of her frilly white sleep mask every morning.

After 25 years of marriage to the richest and, yes, once upon a time, unquestionably the most exciting man she'd ever known, she had a closet full of furs, she had a wallet full of Platinum, she had everything that a woman could want -- except a reason to get out of bed.

Mavin didn't need an analyst to tell her -- although that didn't stop her from seeing one and being told it three times a week -- that she was bored. But he was wrong. She wasn't bored. She was *bored, bored, bored*. So bored that once, before dawn, she'd actually gone and shouted it from the housetops. Why had she even bothered? When she'd finally come down for breakfast, Price -- sitting there, oh so typically self-absorbed, sipping his coffee over his copy of *The Wall Street Journal* -- had merely remarked that he thought the rooster needed to be taken to the vet.

Was this the attentive, passionate, caring man who'd once bucked family tradition and gone down on one knee in the aisle of an IHOP restaurant at 2 a.m. to propose to a waitress with barely a sticky penny to her name? As much as she wished to say it was so, she knew that she could not. There was a world of difference between the man who'd carried

her to his marriage bed and the one who tossed restlessly now for six hours each night, apparently in some kind of pain. At what point, Mavin wondered, had the distance, the coldness started? Well, if you were going to get technical about it, it had actually started at 9 a.m. Monday, the day after the honeymoon. Ever since that morning over two decades ago when Price had returned to work, business had obsessed him, inflamed him, literally consumed him in ways she'd preferred not to contemplate. Yes, it was true that all along they'd had their getaway weekends. But what pleasure was there in jetting around the globe to a ritzy casino to watch a glum, workaholic husband repeatedly throw nines and fives? It all served to explain why the prospect of Price's mandatory retirement had for years held out the glorious promise of a second honeymoon. And when he'd averted it, why, in protest, Mavin had *almost* taken a scissors to her Platinum Cards, till a little voice that said “Shop” stilled her trembling hand.

The loneliness that came with marriage to a man like Price Bundleworth had been easier to weather, of course, in the early years, when there had been children. Curled up with her little ones in front of the fire, reading *The History of the Getty Oil Business* -- she would cherish such moments always. But children grew. Avaris, 21, having come into money long held in trust, was now on the Continent, apparently trying to do Europe on a hundred thousand a day. She missed her terribly. Of her two offspring, she'd always felt a special bond with Avaris. And, of course, she had still not gotten over the tragic death of Cad.

Despite the hot Texas sun that presently streamed in the bedroom windows, rendering her sleep mask useless and making her care-worn eyes feel like charcoal briquettes,

Mavin had just resolved to spend the day, if not the week, in bed, when an unavoidable reason to face the world presented itself. Today, she suddenly remembered, was Price's birthday; and tonight, at the mansion, a gala was planned to help usher in his 70th year. If Mavin had nothing else, she still had her reputation to maintain as a world-class hostess, trend-setting fashion plate, and disher of dirt to First Ladies.

She would get up.

She would get dressed.

She'd call the President's wife, and they'd trash Mrs. Putin.

Then she would go downstairs and oversee preparations for the party down to the last detail.

These things she would do, not because she wanted to -- she was still bored -- no, *more* than bored -- but because, besides being bored, she was also something else, something that only a million-dollar birthday party for her husband could shout from the housetops.

She was a Bundleworth.

So preoccupied with his early-morning routine that he barely noticed that his wife, still in bed, seemed to be having a nightmare in which she was being required -- perhaps at some border crossing -- to repeatedly identify herself, Price Bundleworth came out of the shower, crossed the room, and entered his wardrobe, thinking of the one person in life he couldn't do without: his butler. Major-domo, valet, manager of household affairs, all rolled together and contained within a single somewhat rotund but impeccable figure, Price's man, Edgers, had been faithfully performing for almost four decades both tasks big and small, thus freeing the mogul for complete devotion to business. Today -- as Price noted with pleasure, surveying the wardrobe -

- would be no exception. Saving him precious executive seconds by not having to reach for one inside the closet, a business suit, freshly cleaned and pressed, hung beside the wardrobe's three-way mirror. Though it went hard against the grain, once he was showered, to slow down for anything, Price couldn't help using some of those seconds to stand and admire the items of carefully chosen apparel that were so much a statement of his personal style. The shirt. Long-sleeved. Not tan, not cream, but white. So heavily starched that before you could tuck in the tails, you had to break them over your knee. The tie (unconsciously, the visual focal point of every businessman's attire). Diagonally striped. A placebo for the eyes, giving away nothing. And, finally, the suit. Conservative. Classic. Immune to change, because it was perfect. What the well-dressed executive would be wearing on Earth till the end of time.

A smile of deep satisfaction playing around his lips, Price Bundleworth removed the white shirt from its hanger and proceeded -- though this was like carrying coals to Newcastle -- to dress for success.

And yet, there was another reason, too, for his pursuit of sartorial excellence besides the fact that it was an unwritten rule in the competitive world of CEOs. Simply put, if, in business -- as in life -- appearances mattered, then they never mattered more than when appearances *were* your business.

In Price's case, they were his fortune.

For Price Bundleworth wasn't the CEO of just any corporation, he was the head of Tuxaco, the multinational formalwear conglomerate, renter and seller of tuxedos in 48 states, most nations that accepted the Euro, and also the self-styled "Foremost Purveyor of Elegance to The Third World." To be sure, Tuxaco had its fingers in other pies -- in

oil, in software, in fact, in everything from stem cells to cell phones. But as all were reminded by gyrating singer-dancers each year at its annual convention, the good, solid bedrock of the corporation was still “Deep in the Heart of Tuxes.”

Now repeatedly checking the image of his suit, tie, and cuffs in the three-way mirror as behooved one with such a special responsibility to men’s apparel, Price Bundleworth at last gave the mirror a nod of approval. He was ready for business. A few moments later he was coming down the great winding marble staircase from the second floor, a spring in his step, thinking with pleasure that he wouldn’t take time for a grapefruit this morning, instead he’d wait till he got to work and eat a few VPs for breakfast.

There was one part of his daily regimen, however, that Price made it a point never to neglect. That was the taking of a thoughtful moment before the start of every prosperous day to pay respectful homage to the past, and to tradition, in which he was a strong believer. Walking softly into the library, at this hour still quiet as a cathedral, Price’s eyes scanned the walls hung with art from his private collection -- a superb Renoir, a middling Rubens, a very good Gauguin -- he took out his micro-cassette and spoke briefly: “New Rubens” -- till they came to rest on the large and imposing portrait above the fireplace, the only work in the room that could not be credited to one of the Old Masters. The fireplace, with its facing arrangement of deep leather sofas and armchairs, was the hearth and also the very heart of the Bundleworth estate. Drawing more sustenance for ruling an empire from this little act of communion than he would have from listening to a hundred motivational-lecture tapes, Price stopped by the fireplace and looked up at the portrait of the man who had made it all possible.

He was pictured seated on a boulder in a proud, aristocratic pose, his pelt modestly long, his club held perpendicular to the ground in the manner of a walking-stick: a regal, nameless Neanderthal -- known around the house as “Great-Grandfather” -- who, as archeological evidence showed, had sought for the family a place in the sun till he finally laid claim to the land where the Bundleworth estate, pool, and tennis courts stood today. Rendered posthumously, of course, its details based upon a rather less formal study still visible on the wall of a cave on the edge of the sprawling grounds, the painting served the family as a portrait of struggle and vision, and, not incidentally, as a reminder to others that here were people who were really Old Money.

Enough. Swallowing the lump in his throat, turning on his heel, Price Bundleworth left the library and walked directly to the front door, where, like clockwork, his butler Edgers was waiting, Price’s briefcase in hand.

“Have a good day, sir.”

“Thank you, Edgers.”

With barely a glance, Price Bundleworth had his briefcase and was gone.

A few quick steps, and Price was comfortably ensconced in the back seat of a gleaming black stretch limousine, being chauffeured down the long Texas miles of private roadway and starting on the paperwork that it never ever made him carsick to do on this particular stretch of highway because it was the land, *his* land. Soon, his work back in his briefcase, they’d be on the interstate, where, Price hoped, they wouldn’t be slowed down too much by the usual Monday morning tie-up you always hit coming into the Dallas-Ft. Worth-Bundleworth area.

But unbeknownst to Price, there was far more waiting to stand in the way of his empire than simply the bumper-to-bumper traffic that lay ahead. For watching his limousine as it sped away from the family estate, tracking it keenly, as if it were a stock going down, down, down, were the binocular-aided, hate-filled eyes of someone, who, despite Price's continually rosy financial picture, *was not bullish on Price Bundleworth*.

Someone who didn't know how and didn't know when, but knew only that there would be no rest, *could be* no rest, until the dynasty-wielding billionaire had been destroyed, or, at the very least, brought to his knees, begging for a government bail-out.

Yes, thought the watcher, you have all the marbles now, Price Bundleworth.

But not for long.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tuxaco Building stood like a gleaming colossus on the Bundleworth skyline, 80 stories of starkly modern steel and glass rising, straining, pressing its advances on the sky as if endowed with a passion to grow 20 more stories, muscle aside the protesting clouds, and thrust the Observation Deck (and top executive floors) deep into the heavens, again and again, with relentless power, stalling elevators, messing up desks, till, its energy spent, and in the afterglow of architectural ecstasy, it could finally relax and resolve itself into an enormous, beaming outdoor parking lot.

It was into this symbol of unbridled corporate striving that Price Bundleworth strode Monday morning, eager to assume the reins of leadership from himself on this hallmark date no longer to be marred by mandatory retirement, his 70th birthday, or, as his late son Cad might have said, "the first day of the rest of your life." The fact that it was a very special day for the company president was clearly not lost on those in his employ. As he made his way through the ultra-sleek lobby to an express elevator, "Good morning, Mr. Bundleworth" was echoed with more than the usual perky fervor, eliciting nods though not the fond, fatherly smile that would have allowed some Tuxaco exec to die happy